



NEWCASTLE FALCONS SUPPORTERS CLUB

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT FOR 2007 / 2008

The 2007 / 2008 season started well for the Falcons but ultimately was a season of disappointment on the field. Against this background the Supporters Club has continued to provide a range of services and more importantly to address various matters that needed tackling if we are to continue into the future.

I indicated to the Annual General Meeting last year that the financial position of the Supporters Club was a matter of serious concern. The Supporters Club accounts showed a loss in excess of £4,000 and the drain on resources of providing away coach travel had steadily increased year-on-year, from a loss of £817 in 2002/03 to a loss of £3,202 in 2006/07 (or £2,970.50 once adjusted for all on-board income).

In the past year we have reversed that trend, almost achieving a surplus for the first time in three years and reducing the deficit on away travel from £2,970.50 to £1,596. The average loss per coach has been reduced from £228.50 last year to £88.66 and this at the same time as increasing the number of away trips and the quality of the travel experience.

We have steadied membership numbers after a decline in the previous two years and continued to provide a range of services to those members.

We have held four Talk Ins and a number of social events, including some new activities. Attendance at events is sometimes disappointing: if you have any ideas as to events that we can put on to attract larger audiences, please let us know.

As well as sponsoring two players and presenting regular awards, we have also been actively developing our activities to support charities, with charities benefiting by almost £1,000 from our efforts in the year.

We have revamped our web site and developed e zine as a primary means of communication with Supporters Club Members. Whilst we have not been able to produce our Review this year, due to a loss of sponsorship, we are addressing this matter and it will return next year.

Throughout the past year I have received wonderful support as Chairman from all members of the Management Committee and thank each and every one of them for their enthusiasm and dedication.

On a personal note I also thank my wife and family for their understanding and support.

Martin F Peagam
Chairman

1. Membership

At the Annual General Meeting held on 7 June 2007 a new category of membership was established, that of 'Family Membership', and approval given for Membership Fees to increase annually by 5% from 1 August 2008.

In 2007 / 2008 the Supporters Club attracted 379 individuals to become Supporters Club Members.

Whilst this total is slightly less than the previous season, when there were 411 Members, it is balanced by the fact that Membership Income was £2,885, an increase of £1,000 on the previous year.

Based on the current profile of membership, had we not implemented the changes that we did last year, we would have generated £1,874, less than was generated last year.

The number of Family Memberships (62) was less than anticipated at the start of the year, but has meant that we have more young members, which must be helpful for the long-term future of the Supporters Club.

2. Away Travel

The major task faced by the Management Committee at the start of the 2007 / 2008 season was to stem the growing losses sustained in providing coach travel to away matches.

Over the past five seasons the Supporters Club had sustained increasing losses on away travel, from £817 in 2002 / 2003 to to a loss of £3,202 in 2006/07.

In 2007/ 2008 we have not only maintained our commitment to assisting Supporters Club Members to travel to away matches, but we have done so by providing a quality experience that is cost-effective.

We put on more coaches - 18 coaches to 15 destinations in 2007 / 2008 compared to 13 coaches to 11 destinations the previous season.

Of the 11 away trips operated in 2006 / 2007, only 2 made a surplus. Of the 15 away trips operated in 2007/ 2008, 5 made a surplus. The trips that made a surplus included the ECC Semi Final match at Worcester and the Premiership clash at Leeds: however we are convinced that had both these matches taken place on a weekend rather than a Friday night, then we would have taken more supporters and made more money.

We reduced the overall loss of coach travel - from £2,970.50 the previous year to £1,596 in 2007/ 2008.

We reduced the loss per coach - from £228.50 the previous year to £88.66 in 2007/2008.

3. Social Activities

Whilst the number of social activities has reduced from previous years, those that have taken place have helped generate welcome funds.

As well as the traditional Start the Season Dinner and Christmas Dinner, we attempted some new activities this season. A planned Folk evening did not happen, but we did hold a number of Pool tournaments, a number of pre-match Beer and Buttie events where home supporters could welcome and mingle with away supporters, a Quiz based on the Rugby World Cup, and an end-of-season ceilidh.

The past year has seen us forge a welcome partnership with the Hiding Place – they have generously sponsored prizes for the pool tournaments and been receptive to our plans for events.

We have a number of new ventures planned for next season.

4. Talk Ins

Talk Ins, at which Supporters Club Members get the opportunity to meet and question players, club officials and others involved with rugby, remain a valued part of the calendar for the Supporters Club.

This year we have held four Talk Ins:

- A Kiwi Talk In with Carl Hayman and Mark Sorenson
- An Academy Talk In attended by Richard Metcalf, Mark Laycock, Rob Miller and Micky Young
- A Women's Rugby Talk In with England Grand Slam winners Tamara Taylor and Katy McLean
- A Talk In with the Chairman of Newcastle Falcons, Dave Thompson.

The event with the Chairman was particularly popular and allowed the Chairman and Supporters Club Members to meet face-to-face at what was a time of great change and uncertainty at the Club, following the departures of John Fletcher, Peter Walton and Steve Black, and the announcements that Matthew Tait, Toby Flood, Ben Woods, and Lee Dickson would be leaving the Falcons at the end of the season.

5. Fund Raising

The improved financial position of the Supporters Club has been assisted by fund-raising activities.

Thanks to donations of prizes and the willingness of Supporters Club Members to buy raffle tickets, we raised a surplus of £776 from raffles in 2007/2008 (compared to £495 the previous season).

The main prizes in our Winter and Summer raffles have been signed Falcons memorabilia, with Karen Mallendar winning a signed 2007/ 2008 Falcons shirt in our Winter Raffle and Brian Atkinson winning the signed framed shirt of our sponsored player, Phil Dowson, in the Summer Raffle.

6. Charity Activities

Following on from last season when we raised £233 for good causes, we have put a lot of effort this year to benefit a number of charities.

To welcome Carl Hayman we joined forces with the Falcons to hold beard events. People were sponsored to grow beards. And we provided false beards for those unable or unwilling to grow beards. Joan and Les Milne did a fantastic job in manufacturing beards in various colours including Ladybird! These beards were sold at various events and through the Club Shop. All this activity resulted in the Wooden Spoon Society benefiting to the tune of £480 from the combined efforts of the Supporters Club and the Club Shop.

Later in the season we supported our friends at Worcester Supporters Club. Having been informed that they were raising funds for a local children's hospice through a sponsored bike ride by some silly old granddads, we arranged with the Falcons for a bucket collection to take place at Kingston Park. Thanks to the efforts of a number of Supporters Club Members we raised enough money to make a donation worth in excess of £500 to the hospice.

7. Supporting Players

We have continued to show our support for players in a number of ways.

In 2007 / 2008 the Supporters Club sponsored two players, Club Captain Phil Dowson and Academy Player Rob Miller. Rob had a particularly busy and successful year, winning man of the match on his debut for the Falcons first team, being part of the England Under 20 Grand Slam team, and playing for the Barbarians.

Sponsorship allowed us to hold a draw to select some Supporters Club Members to attend the Sponsors' Dinner and receive the framed shirt from our sponsored first team player. The framed shirt itself was the first prize in our Summer Raffle, whilst match day tickets were made available as prizes in other raffles.

We have continued to award Player of the Month trophies. The winners are voted for by supporters Club Members and receive their trophy from one of those who voted for them. The winners in 2007/ 2008 were:

- September 2007 – Matt Burke
- October 2007 – Tom May / Geoff Parling
- November 2007 – Mark Sorenson
- December 2007 – Jon Golding
- January 2008 – Lee Dickson
- February/March 2008 – Tom May
- April 2008 – Matthew Tait

We also made our Annual Awards. Mark Sorenson was Player of the Season. Tom Dillon was the Emerging Player (following Lee Dickson, Toby Flood and Matthew Tait, who all left the Falcons this season!).

Recognising our growing links with the Club, we presented two awards for Unsung Hero, to Mark Smith (Media Manager), and for Unsung Heroine, to Louise Dickinson (Bar Manager of the Hiding Place).

We are grateful to Living with the Lions, our travel partner, whose sponsorship enables us to make these awards.

A special presentation took place during the year when Jack Stewart on behalf of the Supporters Club presented Mark Mayerhofer with a framed picture of the Tyne Bridges to mark his long service to the Club.

8. Communications

We have attempted to improve our ability to communicate with Supporters Club Members about planned activities, whilst reducing the costs involved. One of the findings of the survey of members carried out last year was that two thirds of Supporters Club Members have access to the internet and would welcome communications electronically, and we have sought to respond to the opportunity that this provides.

The Supporters Club web site was re-vamped and re-launched for the start of the season – the launch being carried out by Phil Dowson and Rob Miller.

We have also sought to develop e-zines as a means of keeping Members informed about what is happening without the need to resort to posting letters. Whilst not yet comprehensive, and recognizing that there will always be some Members who wish to receive information by post, the use of e zines has already reduced our postage and stationery costs whilst at the same time allowing us to communicate with Members in a timely manner.

We continue to contribute to match day programmes – this year has seen a number of guest contributors from amongst Supporters Club Members write pieces to give our regular contributor Perry Green a rest – and to produce the match day Flyer.

One disappointment this year has been our failure to produce a Review. We have lost the sponsorship which allowed us to produce the full-colour version that we had provided for the last few seasons. We know that the Review was particularly popular amongst younger Supporters Club Members and those who cannot get to Kingston Park as often as they would wish. We are committed to rectifying this matter next season.